Effective Use of Time-Out

Behavior Home Page
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LETTER CONCERNING USE OF TIME-OUT

Kentucky Department of Education, 2000

October 13, 2000

Dear Superintendent:

Many of you have asked us for guidance in relation to the use of time-out for students. Additionally, the department has been made aware of concerns about the improper use of time-out for students. These concerns cover issues such as leaving a student in a seclusionary time-out setting for excessive amounts of time, placing the student in a seclusionary time-out setting without proper supervision, using spaces for seclusionary time-out that are not safe, and continuing to implement time-out even after repeated use has failed to reduce the student's inappropriate behavior.

In an effort to provide assistance and address these concerns in a comprehensive manner, the Kentucky Department of Education is sending this information to school superintendents, directors of special education, principals, and parent resource centers to help promote effective policies for implementing appropriate uses of seclusionary time-out for all students. I encourage you to distribute this information to all staff that work with these students and to the parents of these students so that everyone involved can work cooperatively to ensure the student's educational success.

There are no federal or state regulations that address the use of seclusionary time-out; however, suggested below are guidelines and ideas to consider in planning for the use of seclusionary time-out with students. The information provided is based on recent research and practice in the field, guidance from the Office of Special Education Programs, United States Department of Education, and court cases on the subject.

Time-out is a procedure that involves denying a student access to all sources of reinforcement (e.g., teacher and peer attention, participation in ongoing activities) as a consequence of undesired behavior. The purpose is to reduce future occurrences of such behavior. Time-out may be implemented on three levels: (a) contingent observation; (b) exclusionary; and (c) seclusionary. Contingent observation requires the student to remain in a position to observe the group without participating or receiving reinforcement for a specified period. Exclusionary time-out denies access to reinforcement by removing a student from an ongoing activity, while seclusionary time-out removes the student from the instructional setting as a means of denying access to reinforcement. The use of all

levels of time out, especially exclusionary or seclusionary must be premised on assurances that the student's behavior is not a reaction to ineffective instruction.

First and foremost, the use of seclusionary time-outs should only be considered as part of a continuum of interventions and strategies (e.g., teaching and rewarding positive behavior alternatives, not responding to undesired student behavior that is performed for the purpose of obtaining attention, taking away points or privileges as punishment) used with students who display inappropriate behaviors. The use of seclusionary time-out is a drastic measure that should be used as a last defense measure as part of an overall program to instruct the student in appropriate behaviors. How and when seclusionary time-out may be used with a students with disabilities should be thoroughly discussed and explained at the Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) meeting so that everyone involved with the student has a clear understanding of the topic. Use of any time-out must be documented by the ARC in the Individual Education Program (IEP) along with addressing the use of positive behavior supports. Prior to being placed in such a setting, the student, whether he or she attended the ARC, should fully understand circumstances under which he or she may be put into time-out and what to expect from the experience (e.g., length of time and expectations for release).

Prior to the use of seclusionary time-out, the school staff should have knowledge of the student's social and developmental history and any other relevant information about the student's disabilities and background. Additionally, the use of seclusionary time-out should only be used with students when data supports the reduction of the student's inappropriate behavior. The following are guidelines for implementation of effective seclusionary time-out:

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GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE USE OF TIME-OUT
(For more detailed information on the use of time-out, visit the Behavior Web Page at http://www.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/homepage.html)

1. **Obtain Parent/Guardian Permission to Use Time-Out.** Schools may want to consider obtaining written consent from parents or caregivers before using seclusionary time-out as an intervention. If the child has a disability, the use of any form of time-out should be a part of the IEP or 504 plan. The discussion of the time-out should include the specific procedures that will be used, including the circumstances leading to the use of time-out and its effect on the student's behavior. Communication should be made with the parents or caregivers whenever seclusionary time-out has been used as a form of intervention.

2. **Only Use Time-Out as One Component of an Extensive Array of Behavior Interventions.** Time-out, and especially seclusionary time-out, should never be used in isolation as the only behavior intervention being applied. Time-out is only one component of an effective behavior change strategy, and seclusionary time-out is near the end of the spectrum of more restrictive approaches to reducing undesired or challenging student behavior. Time-out must always be used in conjunction with an array of positive reinforcement, and time-out may be implemented on several levels, with the most restrictive version being seclusionary time-out. Procedures should be designed to teach students how to appropriately take a time-out, through role playing and modeling, with a clear understanding of what behaviors can lead to time-out and how the student can avoid this procedure. Seclusionary time-out should only be used when other less restrictive interventions have been attempted and documentation verifies they have been ineffective. Most often when other less extreme procedures are used appropriately, it is not necessary to use seclusionary time-out.

3. **Do Not Engage in Power Struggles with Students.** Forcing a student through physical means to take a seclusionary time-out should be avoided. When you engage in physical power struggles with a student, it becomes a no-win situation. It has been documented that this typically leads to an escalation of the situation and can also lead to injury of students and staff. If a student is posing physical danger to self or others, a plan of action should be in place and staff should be properly trained on its implementation.

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4. **Avoid Excessive Use of Time-Out.** Children should not be secluded in a time-out setting for more than 5-10 minutes at a time, depending on the age of the child, and never more than 15 total minutes. Repeated applications of time-out that exceed 15-minute maximum would not meet these guidelines. The appropriateness of time-out for children and youth at each end of the age spectrum (3-21) is questionable and should be avoided. The continued use of seclusionary time-out must be based on data supporting its effectiveness in reducing a student's inappropriate behavior, and if this data does not exist, the use of this procedure should not be implemented. If a student is using seclusionary time-out as a way to escape or avoid instruction as determined by a functional behavior assessment (FBA), time-out will not be effective.

5. **Never Lock a Student in a Closed Setting and Maintain a View of the Student at All Times.** Students should never be placed in a time-out setting secured with locks or latches or in a fully enclosed area that prevents staff observation and access to the student. For more details on physical design of a seclusionary time-out setting, consult the Behavior Web page.

6. **Maintain Thorough Written Records.** Detailed written records should be kept of use of seclusionary time-out, including the student's name, date, time and incident; prior interventions used, length of time-out and results.

7. **Assess When Time-Out is Not Working.** Functional behavior assessments (FBA) should be performed whenever data indicated that time-out is not effective.

I hope this information will provide assistance to staff on this topic. If additional information is needed, please contact Laura McCullough or Toyah Robey in the Division of Exceptional Children Services at (502) 564-4970.

Sincerely,

Gene Wilhoit

EFFECTIVE USE OF TIMEOUT

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Note:

The following guidelines are presented to help teachers, educators and other practitioners implement timeout procedures appropriately and effectively. These guidelines are not a comprehensive or a complete explanation of how to use timeout in a given setting. Those who are attempting to implement timeout procedures for the first time should have supervision and consultation by professionals with expertise in behavioral intervention procedures, and who have knowledge of the research literature regarding timeout.

Timeout involves removing a student from all sources of positive reinforcement, as a consequence of a specified undesired behavior. Timeout is only one option along a continuum of interventions supporting behavior change. Most teachers think that timeout involves placing the student in an isolated setting (a timeout area) for a period of time. Actually, timeout may be implemented on several alternative levels, ranging from the student taking timeout at his or her desk (contingent observation timeout) to removing the student to a separate area. Timeout is a relatively aversive and intrusive behavior reduction procedure, because it involves the removal of reinforcement and it interrupts the pupil's instructional program. However, its use may be required when the student's behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others. Behavior problems will not be positively affected by use of timeout unless it is used in the context of an appropriate program (e.g., teaching replacement behaviors, high rate of teacher reinforcement for appropriate student behavior, etc.). The age of the student is also a key factor in any decision to utilize time out. Professionals must consider whether timeout is appropriate for children and youth at both ends of the age continuum (3 - 21). Other strategies or interventions may be more effective for these individuals in supporting appropriate behavior

Objectives

You should establish a set of procedures for using timeout in your classroom including:

1. A set of classroom rules and consequences for their infraction.

2. A hierarchy of planned consequences for behavior, with timeout as one of several alternatives for consequenting misbehavior.

3. A range of timeout locations that are suited to your classroom, your pupils, and your personal classroom management plan.

4. A set of personal guidelines for deciding when to use timeout and what level of timeout to employ.

5. Written procedures for applying timeout, including:

- ❑ A warning signal, if appropriate.
- ❑ What you say to pupils when giving them a timeout.
- ❑ Decision rules regarding which level of timeout to impose, and when to go from one level to another.
- ❑ Due process procedures for obtaining administrative and parental consent to use seclusion timeout, if applicable.
- ❑ Specification of the duration of each timeout, how duration is monitored, and decision rules for varying the duration of timeout.
- ❑ Specification of desired student behavior in timeout.
- ❑ Procedures for releasing pupils from timeout.
- ❑ A data sheet for recording instances of timeout.
- ❑ Decision rules for evaluating the effectiveness of timeout with individual students.

6. Alternative interventions when it is concluded that timeout is not effective in a given instance, or in general.

7. Procedures for teaching students to take timeouts appropriately.

A professional with expertise in behavioral interventions should supervise your application of these procedures across three periodic classroom observations, using the Timeout Evaluation Checklist (see Appendix A)**.**

What factors are involved in using timeout?

1. A **warning signal** indicating that timeout is imminent if the pupil doesn't alter his/her behavior.

2. A brief **verbalized explanation** of why the student is being given a timeout if the student did not alter behavior after warning signal was given.

3. Provide **instruction** (see Appendix B) to the student in taking timeout.

4. The **location** in which timeout is taken

- **Contingent observation** - requires the student to remain in a position to observe the group without participating or receiving reinforcement for a specified period

- **Exclusionary** - denies access to reinforcement by removing a student from an ongoing activity

- **Seclusionary** - removes the student from the instructional setting as a means of denying access to reinforcement

5. The **duration** of timeout

- Brief (e.g., 1-5 minutes) timeouts are as effective as longer timeouts if the student hasn't been exposed to long timeouts first.

- Durations longer than 15 minutes should not be employed.

- A **nonverbal signal** indicating the beginning and end of timeout may be used if students have been taught to respond to it.

6. Requirements for **release from timeout**.

- Completion of the specified duration of timeout.

- Appropriate behavior during timeout.

- End of 15 minute maximum duration of timeout (implement alternate intervention if timeout has not been effective at this point).

How should timeout be implemented?

1. Identify reinforcers maintaining the undesired behavior.

2. Conduct a **functional assessment** to identify the function of the target (undesired) behavior.

   - Behavior has two functions: to obtains something the student wants (e.g., teacher or peer attention), or to escape or avoid something he doesn't want (e.g., undesired task)

   - If timeout serves either of these functions, it will not have the desired effect on behavior (e.g., If the student is able to escape an undesired academic activity by going to timeout, behavior resulting in timeout will continue. Timeout also will not be effective if it provides an opportunity to engage in behavior that is self-reinforcing [e.g., self-stimulation]).

   Note: In addition to a timeout contingency, a plan should be in place to support desired replacement behaviors [see Appendix D for differential reinforcement examples].

3. Specify **in advance** the behaviors which will result in timeout.

4. Use less **intrusive behavior reduction procedures** first (i.e., differential reinforcement [see Appendix D], extinction, verbal aversives, response cost).

5. These less intrusive procedures should have been **documented as ineffective <u>before</u> timeout is used**.

6. Develop a **written statement** of how timeout is to be implemented.

7. If **seclusionary timeout** is used, the following requirements should be met:

   • The timeout room should be at least 6' x 6' or larger and based upon the age and size of the student.

   • The room should be properly lighted and ventilated.

   • The room should be free of objects and fixtures with which the student could harm himself.

   • A staff person should be able to see and hear the student in timeout **at all times**.

      • The area should **never be locked**.

         • Use of a fully enclosed area limits staff observation and access to student.

         • Confinement in a small area may lead to an escalation of student behavior.

         • At no time shall a student be placed in a locked area alone.

8. Keep **written records** (see Appendix C) of each occasion when timeout is used including:

   • Student's name and date

   • Episode resulting in timeout

   • Time of entry into and release from timeout

   • The location of timeout (contingent observation, group separation, exclusion)

   • The student's behavior in timeout

9. Always **differentially reinforce** desired student behavior in time-in environment (classroom or instructional setting). (See Appendix D)

10. **Evaluate procedures** (see Appendix A) if timeout duration exceeds 15 minutes.

11. Evaluate the effectiveness of the procedures if timeout is not having the desired impact on student behavior (collect and chart data on the frequency of the target behavior).

   Note: If timeout does not prove to be an acceptable or effective intervention the Admissions and Release Committee shall determine what interventions are to be utilized to address the behavior(s) of concern. A Functional Behavioral Assessment may be necessary, if not already undertaken, to improve upon or develop a Behavior Intervention Plan.

How may timeout be abused?

1. Timeout is overused due to lack of appropriate, proactive, instructional program.

2. The **time-in environment** (Classroom or instructional setting) is not sufficiently reinforcing (see Appendix D).

   - Should give **four times** as much positive reinforcement as reductive consequences.

   - Should have a systematic behavior support plan for teaching and reinforcing a replacement behavior that serves the same function as the undesired behavior.

3. Timeout is **applied inappropriately**.

   - Timeout is the only, or nearly the only, behavior reduction procedure used.

   - Timeout is applied too late---when the student is out of control.

   - Teacher escalates student behavior by lecturing student when in timeout.

4. The **teacher does not enforce timeout contingencies**.

   - Student is able to avoid timeout by arguing or refusing to take timeout.

   - Teacher is unable to direct physically mature students to utilize timeout if they refuse (Consider age appropriateness).

   - Teacher is inconsistent in following through with timeout after warning (i.e., Using timeout after three (3) warnings, five (5) warnings, etc.)

   - Solution is to teach students to take timeout: (see Appendix B).

- Use systematic teaching procedures (e.g., Model, role play/practice and feedback).
- Hold timeout training sessions at other occasions than when timeout is needed: reinforce successive approximations.
- If the teacher is unable or unwilling to enforce timeout, he/she should consider alternate behavior reduction procedures.

5. The effectiveness of **timeout is not evaluated**

- Use the Timeout Record (see Appendix C) to monitor the use and results of timeout. If timeout is used excessively (for example, 3 or more times a day for several consecutive days with a single student) the effectiveness of timeout needs to be evaluated and the individual behavior management plan for that student needs to be adjusted.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Gast, D. L., and Nelson, C. M. (1977). Legal and ethical considerations for the use of timeout in special education settings. Journal of Special Education, 11, 457-467.

Nelson, C. M., and Rutherford, R. B., Jr. (1983). Timeout revisited: Guidelines for its use in special education. Exceptional Education Quarterly, 3, 56-67.

Rutherford, R. B., Jr., and Nelson, C. M. (1982). Analysis of the response-contingent timeout literature with behaviorally disordered students in classroom settings. In R. B. Rutherford, Jr. (Ed.). Severe behavior disorders of children and youth (Vol. 5). Reston, Virginia: Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders.

Twyman, J. S., Johnson, H. Buie, J. D., and Nelson, C. M. (1994). The use of a warning procedure to signal a more intrusive timeout contingency. Behavioral Disorders, 19, 243-253.

Appendix A

Time-out Evaluation Checklist

TIME OUT EVALUATION CHECKLIST
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Directions: Qualified supervisors and consultants may use this form to assess teachers' use of timeout and provide appropriate feedback. Observations should be made on at least three separate occasions (different days) and deficiencies in the application of specific procedures should be corrected with appropriate remedial activities (e.g., modeling, direct instruction, discussion, and referral to informational resources.

Teacher_____   School_____

Evaluation_____   Date_____

Criterion	EVALUATION (Deficient, Satisfactory, Excellent)	Comments and Remedial Suggestions
1. Classroom rules are appropriate and posted.		
2. Hierarchy of planned consequences is appropriate; location of time out in hierarchy is appropriate.		
3. Time out location (s) is/are appropriate.		
4. Teacher can explain decisions regarding when time out is used, and which level is employed.		
5. Written time out procedures are appropriate (evaluate each separately). • Warning signal. • Verbalized explanation to student when giving time out. • Decision rules (i.e., time out levels). • Due process procedures. • Duration of each time out, and how duration is monitored. • Desired student behavior in time out. • Procedures for release from time out. • Time out data sheet. • Decision rules for evaluating time out.		
6. Alternative interventions have been developed and are appropriate.		
7. Procedures for training pupils to take time out are appropriate and effective.		

	YES	NO
8. Teacher observed administering time out.		
9. If yes, were procedures specified above followed?		
10. If yes, did student take time out appropriately?		
11. If yes, was time out successful in controlling student behavior?		
12. If yes, was time out the most appropriate intervention?		
13. If no, was time out intervention needed, but not used?		
14. If no, was classroom management effective?		
15. If no, was alternative intervention applied effectively?		

Comments:

Appendix B

Teaching Students to Take Time-out Appropriately

TEACHING STUDENTS TO TAKE A TIME OUT APPROPRIATELY
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Note: You should not assume that students will comply with directions to take a timeout if they have not been taught how to do so. This task analysis is a generic lesson for teaching students to take timeouts. Task steps should be altered according to the characteristics and needs of individual students. Steps should be practiced systematically several times a day until each is mastered. You may use individual or small group instruction.

STEP	CRITERION
1. Imitate correct time out behavior (sitting or standing quietly in designated area), for 10 seconds following demonstration by teacher.	5 consecutive correct trials for 3 consecutive days.
2. Demonstrate correct time out behavior for 10 seconds following teacher instruction during practice sessions.	Same as above.
3. Demonstrate correct time out behavior for 30 seconds following teacher instruction during practice sessions.	Same as above.
4. Same as Step 3, but time out duration is 2 minutes.	Same as above.
5. Take a 5-minute time out within 10 seconds, when instructed to do so by a teacher in a real time out situation.	50% of assigned time outs taken correctly over 5 consecutive days.
6. Same as Step 5.	100% of assigned time outs taken correctly over 5 consecutive days.
7. Take a 5-minute time out within 10 seconds, demonstrating appropriate time out behavior, when instructed to do so by general education teacher. Note: Provide practice steps 1 - 5 if criterion is not met.	50% of assigned time outs taken correctly over 5 consecutive days.
8. Same as Step 7.	100% of assigned time outs correctly taken over 5 consecutive days.

Comments:

Appendix C

Time-out Record